

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 12660

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI MOPS VS

SUBJECT: 1-A CLEARING IN TROUBLE

FOLLOWING RECEIVED FROM BIEN HOA BEING REPETED

QUOTE

BIEN HOA 0284

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI MOPS VS

SUBJECT: 1-A CLEARING IN TROUBLE

REF: BIEN HOA 279

SUMMARY. ARVN OPERATION TO CLEAR INTERPROVINCIAL ROUTE 1-A ABOVE PHU GIAO, BINH DUONG PROVINCE, IS GOING BADLY. AN ARVN 5TH DIVISION SOLDIER JUST BACK FROM FRONT TOLD A CONGEN RRO THAT AN ENTIRE COMPANY HAD SURRENDERED AND THREE OTHER COMPANIES HAD SCATTERED WHEN FACED WITH COMMUNIST RESISTANCE AND INDUCEMENTS TO STOP FIGHTING. MR 3 IS THROWING ENTIRE 5TH DIVISION AND ELEMENTS OF TWO REGIMENTS OF 18TH INTO FIGHT, BUT COMMUNISTS ARE REPORTED WITH NEARLY TWO DIVISIONS IN AREA. ARVN 5TH DIVISION IS WORST IN MR 3, RELUCTANT TO FIGHT EVEN IN WARTIME AND APPARENTLY ALMOST REFUSING TO DO SO IN CONTEXT OF PARIS AGREEMENT AND JOINT COMMUNIQUE. MEANWHILE, IN PHUOC LONG, MILITARY AND ECONOMIC SITUATION IS DETERIORATING AS RANGERS VIRTUALLY REFUSE

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TO FIGHT COMMUNISTS ALONG NATIONAL HIGHWAY 14, AND SHORTAGES

OF ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES DEVELOP IN SONG BE - PHUOC BINH MARKET FOLLOWING CLOSING OF ROAD DUE TO FIGHTING. COMMENT: GVN IS VERY SERIOUS ABOUT THIS OPERATION, BUT COMMUNIST RESISTANCE MAY PREVENT OPENING OF 1-A AND CERTAINLY WILL EXACT HEAVY PRICE. OPERATION IS DIFFICULT TO DEFEND IN CONTEXT OF AGREEMENT AND COMMUNIQUE; COMMUNISTS CAN CHARGE IT IS BLATANT CEASE-FIRE VIOLATION, AND GVN HAS APPARENTLY NOT EVEN TRIED TO NEGOTIATE IN CONTEXT OF AGREEMENT FOR PEACEFUL RESUPPLY OF ITS FORCES AND ITS PEOPLE IN PHUOC LONG. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

1. CONGEN BINH DUONG RRO VISITED PHU GIAO DISTRICT JULY 11 TO CHECK ON ARVN OPERATION TO CLEAR INTERPROVINCIAL ROUTE 1-A. HE WAS TAILED BY GVN AGENTS ALL THE WAY, BUT HAD NO DIFFICULTY PASSING THROUGH THE MANY ARVN CHECKPOINTS BETWEEN PHU CUONG AND PHU GIAO. AT THE SONG BE BRIDGE, SEVERAL KMS SOUTH OF PHUOC VINH, HE NOTICED ARVN SOLDIERS TOSSING GRENADES AT LOGS WHICH WERE PILED UP IN WATER BENEATH BRIDGE. LOGS OBVIOUSLY HAD BEEN FLOATED DOWN RIVER BY VC TO STOP RAFT WITH DYNAMITE ABOARD WHICH WOULD BE SENT DOWN LATER TO BLOW UP BRIDGE AND CUT OFF PHU GIAO FROM PHU CUONG.

2. RRO GAVE AN ARVN 5TH DIVISION SOLDIER A RIDE FROM PHU GIAO DISTRICT TOWN BACK TO PHUOC BINH. SOLDIER TOLD HIM THAT FIRST BATTALION OF 9TH REGIMENT OF 5TH ARVN INFANTRY DIVISION WAS TRAPPED ABOVE PHU GIAO VIC YT 003560 ON JULY 9. WHEN SECOND BATTALION OF 9TH CAME TO AID OF FIRST BATTALION, COMMUNISTS CAPTURED ONE ENTIRE COMPANY AND SCATTERED OTHER THREE. MOST OF THESE HAVE RE-FORMED BELOW FRONT LINE AND ARE NOW SUPPOSED TO GO INTO BRACH ONCE AGIN WITH ARMOR TO RESCUE THE TRAPPED FIRST BATTALION. SOLDIER TOLD RRO THAT HE THOUGHT ONLY 8 ARVN HAD BEEN KILLED IN ACTION. HE SAID ENEMY IS NOT TRYING TO KILL ARVN BUT RATHER TRYING TO CAPTURE THEM ALIVE OR INDUCE THEM TO DESERT. SOLDIER SAID PEOPLE OF NUOC VANG HAMLET, WHICH IS CO-LOCATED WITH DISTRICT CAPITAL, RECENTLY RECEIVED MESSAGE FROM NVA THROUGH WOODCUTTERS INVITING THEM TO COME TO BINH DUONG-PHUOC LONG BORDER AREA TO WATCH MOVIES NIGHT OF JULY 9. MESSAGE WARNED PEOPLE THAT IF THEY HELPED ARVN OF FAILED TO TELL NVA ABOUT ARVN MOVEMENTS, NVA WOULD DESTROY NUOC VANG.

4. ARVN ELEMENTS AT THE FRONT ARE THE 9TH AND 7TH REGIMENTS
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OF THE 5TH, AND RRO HEARD THAT THE 8TH REGIMENT OF THE 5TH LEFT LAI KHE JULY 10 TO REINFORCE ABOVE PHU GIAO. HE ALSO SAW ELEMENTS OF THE 52ND AND THE 43RD REGIMENTS OF THE 18TH DIVISION MOVING UP FROM LOWER BINH DUONG WHERE THEY HAD BEEN STATIONED SINCE THE PRE-CEASE FIRE II OPERATION TO OPEN 1-A BETWEEN PHU CUONG AND PHU GIAO. RRO SAYS THERE IS CONSIDERABLE INTELLIGENCE ABOUT MOVEMENT OF 95C, 165TH AND 272ND NVA REGIMENTS TO FRONT LINES ABOVE PHU GIAO FROM OTHER AREA IN BINH DUONG. IT IS

THOUGHT THAT THE 141ST NVA REGIMENT IS CURRENTLY BEARING BRUNT OF FIGHTING AGAINST ARVN 5TH.

5. 5TH ARVN DIVISION IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED WEAKEST INFANTRY DIVISION IN MR-3. ITS AUTHORIZED STRENGTH IS 14,116 BUT ACCORDING TO MAY 31 FIGURES THERE WERE 12,434 ASSIGNED AND ONLY 7,745 PRESENT FOR DUTY. DURING MAY, A REASONABLY QUIET MONTH FOR THE 5TH, IT SUFFERED 396 DESERTIONS OR 4.9 PERCENT OF PFD STRENGTH. DIVISION HAS SUFFERED FROM A LONG SERIES OF INCOMPETENT COMMANDERS CHOSEN PRIMARILY FOR LOYALTY TO PRESIDENT THIEU AND HIS PREDECESSORS; CURRENT COMMANDER BG LICH IS RELATIVELY COMPETENT AIRBORNE OFFICER BUT HE CANNOT REVERSE OVERNIGHT THE 5TH DIVISION'S HISTORY OF POOR PERFORMANCE. IT SEEMS THAT 5TH DIVISION SOLDIERS, RELUCTANT TO FIGHT EVEN IN WAR TIME, ARE VIRTUALLY REFUSING TO DO SO IN TIME OF RELATIVE PEACE SIGNALLED BY PARIS AGREEMENT AND JOINT COMMUNIQUE.

6. MEANWHILE IN PHUOC LONG, CONGEN LOCAL REPORTS THAT MILITARY AND ECONOMIC SITUATION IS DETERIORATING. THE 73RD AND 84TH RANGER BATTALIONS, ASSIGNED TO DRIVE COMMUNISTS OFF NATIONAL HIGHWAY 14 IN DONG LUAN DISTRICT, HAVE DISPLAYED LITTLE TASTE FOR COMBAT. DEPUTY SECTOR COMMANDER LTC PHUOC GOT NOTHING BUT EXCUSES FROM RANGER COMMANDERS WHEN HE TOLD THEM TO CLEAR THE ROAD, AND PERSONAL INTERVENTION OF PROVINCE CHIEF, COL. LUU YEM, COMMANDING OPERATIONS FROM HELICOPTER GUNSHIP IN THE AIR ABOVE THE ROAD, WAS REQUIRED TO CLEAR ROAD. RANGER BATTALIONS STILL IN PERIODIC CONTACT WITH VC ELEMENTS ALONG HIGHWAY 14.

7. SINCE FIGHTING BEGAN ON HIGHWAY 1-A, COMMERCIAL VEHICLES HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO MAKE TRIP FROM SAIGON TO SONG BE-PHUOC BINH AREA, SHORTAGES OF RICE AND OTHER STAPLES HAVE QUICKLY DEVELOPED, AND PEOPLE IN HAMLETS ARE SAID TO BE VERY HUNGRY.

8. COMMENT:

A. GVN SEEMS DETERMINED TO USE WHATEVER FORCE IS REQUIRED TO OPEN 1-A AND KEEP OPEN HIGHWAY 14 AT LEAST LONG ENOUGH TO RUN LONG-OVERDUE MILITARY CONVOY FROM PHU GIAO TO SONG BE. CONFIDENTIAL

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COMMUNIST MAIN FORCE REGIMENTS REPORTED IN OR NEAR ROAD COMBAT MAKES IT LIKELY THAT THIS CLEARING OPERATION WILL BE EXTREMELY COSTLY, AND POSSIBLY ULTIMATELY UNSUCCESSFUL.

B. OPERATION IS DIFFICULT TO DEFEND IN TERMS OF PARIS AGREEMENT AND JOINT COMMUNIQUE. COMMUNISTS CAN POINT TO IT AS A BLATANT CEASE-FIRE VIOLATION AND AS JUSTIFICATION FOR ANY RETALIATION OR "PUNISHMENT" THAT THEY MAY WISH TO METE OUT TO GVN. WE KNOW OF NO EVIDENCE THAT GVN HAS SOUGHT MEETING OF OPPOSING LOCAL COMMANDERS OR TPJMC DISCUSSIONS WHICH MIGHT HAVE PERMITTED NON-VIOLENT RE-SUPPLY OF SONG BE-PHUOC BINH.

C. BY SAME TOKEN, IT IS ARVN ROAD-CLEARING OPERATION WHICH HAS LED TO CLOSING OF ROAD AND HARSH ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN PHUOC LONG; DURING MOST OF CEASE FIRE PERIOD COMMUNISTS HAVE PERMITTED CIVILIAN AND COMMERCIAL TRAFFIC TO PASS AFTER COLLECTING TAXES, PURCHASING SUPPLIES AND PROPAGANDIZING PASSENGERS.

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